3:Nash E-5 (1964-1965) 1967
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NV9 .Tzeltal NV9
Teklum

Death as a Way of Life: The Increasing Resort to Homicide in a Maya Indian Community[1]

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The breaking-down of a social-control system based on belief in the guardianship of the spiritual ancestors and their temporal agents, the curers, is reflected in a rising homicide rate as people turn to individual sanctions when threatened. The acts of homicide differ in their social significance according to who is killed, the context, the agency, and the motivation of the killer. Thirty-seven homicides between 1938 and 1965, analyzed in terms of these component variables, reflect the conflicts arising from competition in new economic enterprises, the rising suspicion of curers' abuse of their supernatural power, and the loss of belief in the guardianship of the ancestors.

THE social impact of homicide has caused some analysts[2] to treat it and its supposed inverted complement, suicide, as one kind of behavior with a single meaning, ignoring Durkheim's caveat that behavioral rubrics categorize diverse phenomena. Here I shall analyze the variety of strategies involved in killing in a Mexican community, which I shall call Teklum (the Tzeltal term for village), and endeavor to show how rules of behavior are expressed in killing and in attempts to avoid being killed. Further, I shall endeavor to point out what these indicate about structural and organizational changes both within the community and in its relations with the wider society. Since suicide is absent, except for a single case of a madman, I have restricted my enquiry to homicide.

Teklum is a predominantly Indian township of Mexico. The population of the town center—about 1,900—includes only one Ladino, or non-Indian, family, that of the schoolteacher. The sense of community is limited to people living in the center and in the four nearby hamlets (*barrios*).

The town center is divided physically and socially into two endogamous sections, called "upper" and "lower." The outlying hamlets are linked to the nearest section by social and economic ties. The civil and religious posts of the town are, in local theory, apportioned evenly between the sections. This was in fact true until the 1950's; for each of the ranked posts had a paired complement, so that both sides of the dual division were represented, and the single posts of president and *síndico* (the president's administrative assistant) were al-

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tions of self will find a responsive audience only within these linguistic and physical boundaries. The sense of insulation is a denial of regional and national political institutions in which they interact with the other Indians and Ladinos who are part of their present world and share their history. The town itself is a product of the Spanish colonial *congregación*, which drew together diverse Indian populations that had been scattered in small settlements. The outlying barrios are occupied by Indians who have moved out from the center, as well as foreign Indians who had worked in the *fincas*, or large plantations, within the township. These latter people are referred to by a derisive term, *Kurik*, meaning roughly "country hick." Beyond these, and still within the municipal limits, there are a series of *colonias*, settlements populated by Indians who have moved here from other towns and by *mestizos*, or acculturated Indians. These settlers acquired land in the time of Juarez or later in the Cardenas period. Ladino men are called *Kašlan* and women *Šinlan*; foreigners who do not appear to be of the country are called *Alemán*, the Spanish term for German.

The focus of this book is on the lives and thoughts of people living within the center. The people of Tzo'ontahal live in a square world, surrounded by a round universe. From the square hole, cut in the earth at the center post of their square house to receive the sacrifice of a live chicken when the house is built, stretches a square village (it appears as a rectangle on the map, but they draw it as a square).[2] The fields are measured in squares of twenty-five arms' breadths, with five handspans measuring the square between each plant. Within this square world, they have elaborated techniques for dealing with spiritual and human co-residents in curing rituals, offerings for crops, burial practices, and baptism rites. Their present cultural stock reveals a selective absorption of Spanish colonial features along with twentieth-century innovations. They have techniques for planting and harvesting milpa, marketing the pottery manufactured in all the households, curing an eclipse of the moon, divining causes of illness and curing the maladjusted social relations which cause it, manufacturing and

2. This view of the world as square is shared by Tzeltal and Tzotzil neighbors in Larraínzar (Holland 1963:69), San Pedro Chenalhó (Guiteras Holmes 1961:254), and Pinola (Hermitte 1964). The four-direction concept of the village and world noted by Landa (Tozzer 1941:135) suggests a square-space concept.

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marketing contraband liquor, minimizing discord and settling disputes locally, and preserving continuity in a town administration marked by the annual rotation of officials.

These are the techniques acquired for dealing with the world in which they were born. For the world into which they are being propelled, they are combining new skills with old, creating a semblance of continuity but with a recombination of elements. Fitting this square community into the round post-Columbian world is a task consciously undertaken by the Mexican government. Within the town, strategies are being developed to meet the new demands made on the community as economic and political horizons widen.

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The problem focus on the relation between belief and behavior in a changing social environment can be restated by asking how behavior is conditioned by custom and how it responds to cues from the environment. The first class of responses is adjustive, fitting the behavior of the individual to a given environment, and the second is adaptive, changing the external environment (Kluckhohn 1962:46). I shall use the distinction Mowrer and Kluckhohn (1944:258) have made between adaptation, "which develops and changes inherited ways of behaving," and adjustment, "which develops and changes habits," with the former referring to socially acquired responses and the latter to individual responses. A moving equilibrium is found when changes in adjustive and adaptive responses fit a persisting framework of understandings and explanations. Both adjustive and adaptive responses follow rules. These rules enable social groups to generate consistent, understandable, and appropriate behavior in response to a variety of settings. The "rules of the game" set the parameters for adjustive behavior; the "rules of strategy" generate behavior adaptive to change. The rules of the game are validated by the belief system of the society; the rules of strategy can be justified on the same premises, but if they are so fundamental as to challenge existing values, they require a new ideology.

The model of change which takes into account the techniques of adaptation and adjustment occurring within small-scale societies is that of moving equilibrium. Wallace (1962:142) has stated the dimensions of this model:

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Summary and Conclusions

The preceding generalizations anticipate conclusions that will be stated in terms of the hypotheses raised in the Preface. 181 105 182

1. *The stability of the society varies directly with the efficiency of its procedures for adjusting conflict.* The rising homicide rate is a behavioral index to the breakdown in procedures for adjusting conflict. The elders and cures still officiate in rituals to settle conflict, but their judgments are no longer as effective in overcoming fear and suspicion. The principle of age-based authority on which their authority rests has been undermined by ejido lands giving married sons earlier independence from their fathers and by young leaders assuming positions of power in the civil authority. More dispute cases have been referred to the departmental courts in the 60s than in the 50s.

2. *The stability of the society varies directly with the ability to validate behavioral innovations in terms of existing values.* Leaders in the new economic enterprises and the political factions based on them have tried to justify their efforts by stressing the goal of increasing their independence from the Ladinos. Their attempt to develop an ideology emphasizing the need for cooperation to overcome the dominance of the Ladinos is handicapped by the rampant suspicions about other members of the community and pessimism about the chances of the cooperative to succeed in the wider world. The conflict in the individual between desire for improvement of his welfare and fear of exciting envy is exacerbated by each innovation that raises the level of living. The leader who was most explicit in formulating an ideology for adapting to the new, the entrepreneur Santos, was a victim of the conflict he tried to interpret. There is no expression of pan-Indianism that could support the goal of cultural separatism of Indians from Ladinos. Indigenismo is the ideology of national leaders who have left behind the cultural heritage they extol. The Indians of Tzo'ontahal are as suspicious of neighboring Indians as they are of Ladinos. The retreat into separate communities which has ensured their survival in the four and a half centuries of colonial rule and independence makes it difficult to mobilize

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181 support for cultural independence as economic interdependence grows.
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182 3. *The stability of the society varies directly with the effectiveness of its procedures for transforming old power positions into ceremonial posts.* The community demonstrated the effectiveness of its technique of cooling off old power-holders as new leader usurped the authority of the principales. The struggle going on between the curers and the new civil leadership had not been resolved in ceremonial absorption of the curers' power when I left the community. The community was ridding itself of these fear-provoking agents of the supernatural by resorting to homicide. The loss of the institution of the alférez marked the waning of these old techniques of ceremonially incorporating leadership into a traditional hierarchy and linking civil office with religious obligations.

4. *The lability of the society varies directly with the gap between expectations and experience.* The Indians condition themselves to expect the worst and so are not disappointed by it. They pray only that they may maintain a given level of suffering and poverty. They are not caught up in that revolution of rising expectations that makes for discontent when experience does not match them. The Indians know they
[175] are better off than they were, and they contrast their present prosperity
[731] with the famine of 1915 when revolution and banditry depleted their crops and cattle, and with the typhoid epidemic of 1928 when hundreds died and the rest did not have the money to bury them properly. An attitude of pessimism about the future limits the problem of adjusting to it or of making adaptations to improve it. One could predict neither revolution nor moral collapse.

5. *The lability of the society varies directly with the degree of dissonance between traditional and contemporary interpretations of events.* The old explanations are still applied to current events. Disaster is blamed on individual or communal failure to carry out ceremonials. Sickness and death are attributed to witchcraft motivated by envy or malice. The paranoic theories of human nature are confirmed by every illness or death that occurs. Even the gods are characterized as envious and vindictive. Containment of blame for misfortune within the community minimizes the political involvement of Indians in the wider society and limits the changes that might affect them.

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The material conditions making for equilibrium are breaking down within the community, but the failure for protest to develop means that old beliefs are not challenged by new ideologies. Adaptations and adjustments made in response to changes are still forced into this framework of understandings and expectations. But without any stated changes in belief, Indians are themselves transforming the internal structure of the society by undermining the old gerontocracy and shifting the locus of power to the innovating young men. A binary model of change that poses a transformation from traditional to modern might ignore these internal changes that maintain a given equilibrium intact but that provide a reordering of power making possible a successful adaptation to larger social orders. Tzo'ontahal is a case in point proving that the external conditions are not sufficient to explain fundamental restructuring of the society. People continue to act out a faith in the ways of the ancestors at the same time that adjustments and adaptations are made in response to increasing interdependence in regional and national institutions. The same framework of government is retained as shifts of power give scope to a new kind of leadership. Continuity in forms has the positive effect of preserving a sense of security. The social costs are a slowing down of adaptive responses and a high investment in the "ceremonial fund" (Wolf 1966). The benefits can only be measured by comparison with cultures that have lost these controls.

The universal problem which this community is in the process of working out has been stated by G. H. Mead (1938:22): "How is a society to find a method for changing its own institutions and still preserve the security of those institutions?" The present phrasing of the problem in the community is: "How can we preserve the solutions of the past and apply them to the present?" So long as the problem is phrased in this way, the solution is to exile or kill the deviants or innovators who attempt fundamental change. The threat of witchcraft continues to maintain conformity, and fear subverts the search for an ideology to phrase behavioral adjustments and adaptations in such a way that they will be congruent with future goals. Such an ideology cannot be imposed. Only the people themselves can work out the ways in which meaning and understanding are given to technological and social change.

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628 438 establish with them the relations of posada and compadrazgo, men-
571 tioned above, as well as (in the infrequent cases of inter-com-
608 582 munity marriage), some affinal kinship ties. In the few recorded
628 166 cases of emigration from the village, some members of the com-
602 munity keep communication with a few consanguineal relatives living
in other Indian villages, although social exchanges and the memory
of such relatives tend to die out after a generation or two.

• 105 With the other Indian communities in the area, Amatenango
and Aguacatenango share a common material culture and belief
system, derived from a Highland Maya cultural tradition, the same
linguistic background, and a subsistence pattern based on agri-
culture. They are peasant, in the sense that they are rural vil-
lages which depend, for survival, not only on agricultural work,
but on economic exchange with other semi-urban and urban centers
(Redfield, 1956:25-28).

438 Aguacatenango buys pottery and chayotes from Amatenango,
[273] whose women come periodically to sell them, and trago (drinking
alcohol) which some Amatenangueros produce illegally. Amatenango
buys from Aguacatenango surplus corn.

628 The two towns have amicable relations, thinking of each
[311] other as neighbors, and sharing the same pasture lands, and
[312] source of water for irrigation. The two communities share the
628 same cultural hero, called Juan Lopez in Aguacatenango and Lopez
716 Shuntón in Amatenango, connected with the corn and with the
"lightening who lives in a cave." For Aguacatenangueros this
personage is the builder of the roads, responsible for the erad-
ication [illegible]annibalism," the conversion of man-hunting animals

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I SUMMARIZE the evidence offered in the inaugural acts first in terms of a functional analysis of the ceremonial behavior and second in terms of structural and organizational changes revealed in the strategies of interaction. The following goals are attained in the rituals of inauguration:

1. *Preservation of continuity.* In the highland Maya Indian communities the problem of maintaining continuity is crucial because most of the offices

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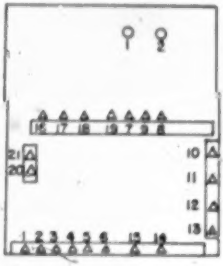

CHART 14 — HOUSE OF THE COFRADE OF SACRAMENTO, FIESTA OF SAN PEDRO SAN PABLO (OBSERVED)

WOMEN (circles):
1 *Me⁹il K'op*
2 *Sčebal ıme⁹*

MEN (triangles):
16 Cofrade of Sacramento *(Kobraria Sakramentú)*
17 First Nakawane *(Sba Nakawane)*
18 Second Nakawane *(Sčebal Nakawane)*
19 Third Nakawane *(Yolebal Nakawane)*
20, 21 Guitarist *(Balnial Alpultero)*

Remaining numerals refer to role terms listed in Chart 13.

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are changed simultaneously. The emphasis on continuity is evident, first of all, in the repetition of bodily and verbal performances. Repetitive behavior, the essence of all ritual, provides that fulfillment of expectation which assures participants in a performance of a link with the past. Bunzel (1952, p. 251) has shown that this familiarity of ritual "sets" in a variety of ceremonials provides linkage with the past in the inauguration in Chichicastenango. Repetition in behavior is reinforced by verbal references to perform-

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ing "what our mothers and fathers did" (App. 1, Q. 19; App. 2, Q. 37, Q. 64). Second, continuity can be seen in the presence of both old and new officials in the townhall. In this setting, the old officials acknowledge acceptance of the new officials (App. 1, Q. 28). Finally, of greatest importance in establishing continuity are the principales, who await the arrival of the new officials with the old officials (App. 1, Q. 28) who pass over the symbol of authority (App. 1, Q. 31), and who remain alone in the townhall for the return of the new officials, when they have gone to church.

2. *Role commitment.* The officials are members of closed corporate communities, integrated in a prior set of kinship and other social relations. They cannot rely on anonymity when acting in their official capacity as judge or policeman. Thus one of the functions of the inauguration as a rite of passage is a disengagement from the preexisting network of obligations and a commitment to the obligations of the office (cf. Parsons, 1951, pp. 80–84; Gluckman, 1962, p. 34; Cancian, 1964). Behaviorally, this function is indicated in the unfailing use of the term *Mam* (elder respect term) in both address and reference. The reference to the holy nature of their task (App. 1, Q. 19) and of the symbol of their authority, the "holy" staff (App. 1, Q. 30) which they always carry when discharging an official errand, establishes the supernatural authority on which the role is based. The effectiveness of these symbolic role identities in neutralizing prior affective commitments can partially be judged in that most dispute cases are brought before the local courts rather than referred to higher courts, suggesting that the complainant expects fair treatment.

3. *Role learning.* The inauguration provides a setting in which the individual who is about to assume office learns what is expected of him (cf. Fortes, 1962, p. 82). The instruction of the novice officeholder is acquired most importantly in the home from the speeches of the *nakawanehetik* and cofrades (App. 1, Q. 19; App. 2, Q. 37, Q. 38, Q. 64) and in the directions he may be given in the ceremonial setting (App. 2, Q. 39, observation).

4. *Introduction of new officeholders to the villagers.* The new status of the officeholders is made

public in the procession around the plaza (App. 1, Q. 39). The mayordomos gather in the church specifically to view the new incumbents (App. 1, Q. 50). There is less public display of new officeholders in the case of the religious officials than in the case of civil officials.

The morphological description of the structure of a society is inadequate unless it includes role behavior as well as status positions. The behavioral data pro-

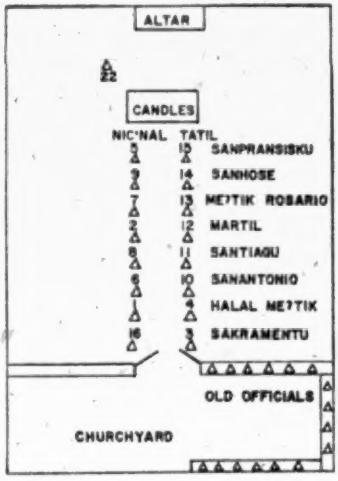

CHART 15 — NEW MAYORDOMOS INSIDE CHURCH, FIESTA OF SAN PEDRO SAN PABLO (OBSERVED)

vide the basis for describing the physiology of a culture, or how actors and social groups interrelate in carrying out tasks. In the inaugurations, the household emerged in the behavioral descriptions as an important ritual domain supporting the civil and religious hierarchy. Similarly, the asymmetrical relation between the role of religious officials in the civil inauguration and that of civil officials in the religious

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APPENDIX 3K—SUMMARY OF SETTINGS, ROLE, AND BEHAVIOR IN CIVIL INAUGURATION

SETTING	ROLE (terms in capital letters refer to groups)	RELATIONSHIP	BEHAVIOR
House, evening of inauguration	*ʔAČ'ATEL*, new officials	Ego	Receives guests, sits next to leader *nakawane*
	NAKAWANEHETIK, house officials	Father of new official or elder of neighborhood who has passed in higher offices (first regidor and elder mayordomo)	Initiates greetings; sits in head seat
	BALNIALETIK, assistants	Sons of new officials, husbands of daughters or of sisters	Serve food, measure drinks
	ʔAK'SIETIK, wood gatherers	Neighbors, compadres, brothers	Bring wood, eat, drink
	MEʔELETIK, Meʔil K'op, woman speaker Yinam, wife	Mother, or elder relative	Responds to *nakawane's* greetings
	SKOLTAWANEHETIK, helpers		Serves food. Cook food, dish out food, eat
House, morning of inauguration	*NAKAWANEHETIK*, house officials	Father and/or elder neighbors	Initiates greetings, addresses blessing to liquor
	AʔTELETIK ALKALETIK REHIROLETIK, judges, regidores	Men of village	Receive food and liquor
	BALNIALETIK, assistants	Brothers-in-law, godsons, compadres, fa's sis's sons, brother, comadre's son, neighbors	Serve food, measure drink
	YULATAK, visitors	Men from rural colonias	Give *abrazo*, embrace, to new president, eat, drink
	MEʔELETIK, women Meʔil k'op Sčebal Smeʔ Yolebal Smeʔ	Mother or elder relative ? ? ?	Responds to *nakawane's* and *alkal's* greeting. Orders women in serving of food
	ŠKOLTAWANEHETIK, helpers	(See Chart 3)	Cooks food, dishes out food
Townhall, morning session, civil inauguration	*K'AʔAʔTELETIK*, old officials	Men of village	Drink; wait for new officials seated
	ʔALPERESETIK, alfereces	Men of village	Bring banners from church, drink wait for new officials

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APPENDIX 3B—SUMMARY OF SETTINGS, ROLE, AND BEHAVIOR IN RELIGIOUS INAUGURATION

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SETTING	ROLE (terms in capital letters refer to groups)	RELATIONSHIP	BEHAVIOR
[574] House of kobraria Sacramento, morning of inauguration	KOBRARIA SAKRAMENTU	Ego	Receives guests; sits at first seat on outside wall near door
[604] [605]	NAKAWANEHETIK	Fa's brother and fa's brother's sons	Initiates greetings, sits at head seat
[593] [608]	BALNIALETIK	Sons, sons of campadres, neighbors	Serve liquor, food
[602]	ME?ELETIK, women	Elder female relative	Responds to *nakawane's* greetings, orders helpers
[608]	Me?ilk'op, woman speaker		
	ŠKOLTAWANEHETIK, helpers	Comadres, sisters, neighbors	Prepare food, coffee
	MARTOMAETIK 3 KOBRARIA TATILETIK NIČ'ANILETIK		Eat and drink. Listen to advice of *nakawanchetik*
Church, morning of inauguration	PIŠKAL, fiscal KURA, priest ?AČ'MARTOMAETIK, new mayordomos K'A MARTOMAETIK, old mayordomos		Advises mayordomos of duties. Divides up candles brought by mayordomos; hands them to new mayordomos